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SUBJECT: MOROCCO LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN FOR 2012 TANGIER EXPO

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¶11. (U) Summary; The Moroccan government kicked off its campaign for Tangier's bid for the 2012 International Expo by convoking the diplomatic corps to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Tuesday, January 23, for a presentation outlining its plans. Minister-delegate Fassi-Fihri stressed the importance Morocco attaches to Tangier's candidacy, noting that it would be the first exposition to be held in an African, Arab, or Muslim country. Officials outlined the bid's theme of "Routes of the World and the Meeting of Cultures: for a more United World," which seeks to emphasize Tangier's role as a crossroads of the Western Mediterranean. Moroccan officials conceded that they face tough competition from Polish and Korean competitors, but outlined an active campaign leading up to December's vote in the Bureau of International Expos (BIE). End Summary.

¶12. (U) Ministry officials characterized the January 23 session as the official launch of Tangier's candidacy for the 2012 expo, and used the opportunity to outline their plans for the event. Minister-delegate Fassi-Fihri, who chaired the session, stressed Morocco's belief that the time has come for an expo to occur on "African, Arab, and Muslim soil," and noted that the theme chosen is intended to take advantage of Tangier's role as a gateway between Africa and Europe by stressing "Routes of the World and the Meeting of Cultures: for a more Unified World." Officials outlined plans for a circular exposition park of 100 hectares, which would open on to the bay at Tangier. Five separate access points would correspond to five subthemes: routes and systems of transport, human and cultural paths, commercial routes, virtual routes, and roads of the imagination.

¶13. (U) Tangier's governor, Mohammed Hassad, noted that the exposition would require an investment of over 400 million USD, but that it would generate nearly 100 million USD in profits, which would enable the city to pursue new cultural and social projects. He stressed the major infrastructure investments and improvements that are already underway in the Tangier area, including notably the Tanger-Med port, new highways and train lines, the progressive transformation of both residential and industrial areas in the city, and the preservation of the city's patrimony. While conceding that Tangier's current hotel capacity is only 1300 beds, he noted that by 2012 the capacity of Tangier and its surrounding region will increase to 40,000, well in excess of what the expo would require. Urban transportation improvements are also on the horizon, he said, to reinforce the city's existing transportation network.

¶14. (U) According to organizers, the next key step is a visit by representatives of the International Exposition Bureau (BIE) to verify the viability of Tangier's candidacy. That

visit is scheduled for March 30-April 4. Noting that Tangier faces competition from both Wroclaw in Poland and Yeosu in South Korea, officials indicated Moroccan lobbying will continue and intensify in the run-up to BIE's December vote.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Hassad has already attracted extensive attention throughout Morocco and internationally for his dynamism and success in tackling and starting to reverse the city's longstanding decline. Moroccan officials clearly view the Expo as a way to further reinforce these efforts, given expectations of 6 million visitors during its planned three month run. The Ambassador attended the briefing and in comments to the press outlined the informal assistance he has extended to expo organizers, in facilitating their contacts with U.S. counterparts who have taken part in past Expos.
End Comment.

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